







# STUDIES

IN  
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

The Jesuits and Politics in Time of War

*A Self-Appraisal*

ROBERT BIRELEY, S.J.

BX3701 .S88x

Studies in the spirituality of Jesuits.

Issue: v.34:no.5(2002:Nov.)

Arrival Date: 12/06/2002

O'Neill Periodicals

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*Robert Bireley, S.J.*

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STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS  
34/5 · NOVEMBER 2002

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## *The first word . . .*

“Human kind cannot bear very much reality,” T. S. Eliot tells us. How true. I spent a good deal of the first anniversary of the terrorist attacks avoiding television and the newspapers. At first I thought this was a still-moist wound exclusively on the psyche of us New Yorkers, but commentators since the anniversary have assured me that the sense of emptiness extends far beyond that aching cavity at Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan. Grief knows no city limits. People around the world endured the commemoration as though the bandages had been torn back and they could once more measure the scab.

In the way of humans, we mark anniversaries in our struggle to understand “what might have been and what has been,” to cite Eliot again. Through selective recollection, we construct networks of cognitive association to make sense out of a world of seemingly infinite complexity. In our unending search for meaning, we create personal, private, internal symbols from public things, persons, and events. The videotape retells the story, again and again and again. Historians, economists, and theologians have offered explanations. Statesmen, generals, and demagogues propose solutions. We’ve listened to the many voices, bewildered, and the search goes on. A year and some days after the flame and rubble, what did it mean, for me, for us? Where are the symbols?

In many ways, September 11 represented a violent rupture in the pattern of my conceptual, psychic, and even spiritual universe. In one morning’s work, nineteen men, vassals of death, challenged both my, our, American faith in progress and my, our, Christian optimism. These are the twin towers of American Jesuits. Now, any naive assumptions about their inviolability have been summarily stripped away. We labor through long hours because we believe our work will make the world a bit better for our trouble. But now we’ve been tempted to recognize that the world doesn’t seem much the better for our efforts.

I’ve always believed that progress was the norm, and regression the aberration. My experience as an American, a Christian, and a Jesuit holds nothing out of the ordinary for people of my age. Early childhood recollections hold dim memories of the end of the Second World War. German bombers and submarines no longer threatened the Brooklyn Navy Yard and my home. Absent family members would soon come home. No more blackouts, rationing cards, and war-bond drives in school. Nuremberg seemed to offer the promise that such crimes against humanity were but a raucous interlude in the symphony of civilizations. Never again such wanton, systematic death. The brute in the species had been tamed. It would surely be a better world.

Communism, the Cold War, and the hydrogen bomb soon darkened the horizon once more; but in time sanity prevailed: non-proliferation, disarmament, and eventually the Berlin Wall in ruins, a wrecked monument to an ill-conceived eco-

conomic fantasy. Colonialism in Africa and Asia evaporated in a few short years. Dictatorships and instability were little more than growing pains in a maturing world body politic. Democracy replaced military rule in nation after nation in Latin America. Surely, a better world awaited us just around the next bend in the road.

One of the few periodicals allowed in our juniorate was *Blueprint for the South*. I knew about Jackie Robinson's coming to the Dodgers, but at age nineteen, I hadn't really thought much about universal human dignity. *Blueprint* drew back the curtain on that darkened cloister with its descriptions of lunch-counter sit-ins. Dr. King and the civil-rights act followed. Now—with some exceptions, of course—Americans argue questions of racial equality in terms of how and when, not whether. A better world, without doubt.

The first repercussions of Vatican II started to vibrate through the Church by the time I reached theology. Enthusiasm bred excess, of course, as many of us perceived even then; but the Church had embarked on an exciting venture, and being part of it made us a privileged generation. Teilhard told us that all things would converge at the Omega Point, and we could feel the irresistible force moving the world ahead in our lifetimes. It would just take time for a new generation (Kennedy's term) to enact the spirit of the council; but within a few years lay men and women, representatives of all peoples and cultures would assume their rightful place among the "people of God." Better, yes, without question, and soon, we believed.

Of course, there would be problems. Few could doubt that, but these would be so many detours on the road to a better future. In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan told us about a "global village" built on radio and television waves. By the 1970s it seemed clear that a proliferation of media would bring fragmentation rather than unity. Today, patrons of Voice of America and Al Jazeera might be living not in different villages but in distant galaxies. The Internet shows the hate-filled how to make bombs to kill at random and the lonely how to find child pornography to defile the innocent.

Who would have imagined a year ago that so many priests would be involved in this vile business? Conservatives blame much of the problem on the upheaval that followed the council; liberals feel that the Church failed to follow through on the logic of its own reforms; both recognize that we have come face to face with an evil that dwells within the people of God. Sadly, it took the secular press to bring us to our knees, the posture of atonement, shared by dispirited innocent and guilty alike. Repentance precedes the cleansing.

The traumas of the Vietnam War and Watergate, horrible as they were, ended our gullibility, but gave rise to cynicism. Press and public would be slow to believe officials again. Perhaps, on the whole, we were better off having lived through a generation of deception. After the Holocaust, the human race could never permit genocide, but then came Kosovo and Rwanda. Dresden, Hiroshima, and London put an end to indiscriminate killing of civilians to achieve political ends; the Khmer Rouge were merely an aberration. So are the tragically squandered suicide bombers in Israel. Maybe those people who were blowing up shopping malls in Northern Ireland are distant, unknown cousins. Contempt for innocence knows no national boundaries. It touches all of us.



So at last the point: the months after September 11 led me—and I suspect many others—to reexamine some basic premises of Jesuit life: our faith in progress and optimism. It was a quiet trauma—not a violent wound, but a chilling at the core of the soul. Perhaps, after these days one might reasonably conclude as we look over the checkerboard of recent history that evil is the predominant pattern of the world, and the indisputable triumphs of wisdom and justice mere dots of light on a dark fabric, illusions of progress. Is our vast fellowship really moving toward its Omega Point, as we had always believed, or do we now have reason to doubt? Is ours a generation of progress, with many troublesome regressions, or is it a generation of chaos with occasional triumphs to keep us going? . . .

Eliot entertains similar grim thoughts: “Time and the bell have buried the day, the black cloud carries the sun away.” The sentiments are grim but real, and I suspect that they are shared by many in this dark season. If my suspicion has any basis in fact, then our understanding of several key meditations in the Spiritual Exercises shifts dramatically. The dark side of the invitation in the Kingdom (nos. 93–97), the survey of the world in the Incarnation (nos. 103–8) and the realm of Satan in the Two Standards (nos. 140–142) cannot be regarded as an exercise of the imagination used to set up the contrast with the rule of God. These days they are the reality that retreatants taste and touch and hear. The movement from the First Week to the Second and from the Third to the Fourth, it seems, could require a great deal more effort for us Americans than they once did. Hope comes with a heavy price tag.

I ask, then, a question and invite a response from readers. Have our making and giving the Exercises, our counseling and directing, our prayer and our ministry changed in the months since the towers fell? How could they not?

Eliot once again points in the direction of an answer:

Love is the unfamiliar Name  
Behind the hands that wove  
The intolerable shirt of fire  
Which human power cannot remove.

*Richard A. Blake, S.J.*  
*Editor*



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# THE JESUITS AND POLITICS IN TIME OF WAR

## *A Self-Appraisal, 1645-1646*

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*By consciously adopting a spirituality of engagement with the world, Jesuits have often labored on that ill-defined frontier where politics and religion meet and overlap. In times of war especially, national loyalties and diverse perceptions of the greater good often divide us. During the Thirty Years War, Jesuits assigned to serve as confessors to rival princes were inevitably drawn into the politics of the court. The ongoing efforts by the Jesuit General, the Pope, and the Eighth General Congregation to offer clear guidelines show how difficult it is to find a formula that satisfies everyone. Is it any different in our time?*

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## Introduction

The controversies generated by Jesuit involvement in politics extend over many pages of history and have not yet been resolved. Surely it is inevitable that controversies would arise, given the Society's charism and mission to serve others in the world. Religion and politics were much more closely interwoven in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than they are today. Jesuits in the pre-Suppression era often exercised political influence through contacts with monarchs or princes, ministers and courtiers, rather than through the democratic processes and popular movements that characterize politics in many countries today. Not infrequently enemies accused Jesuits of being "powers behind the throne" or engaging in conspiracies like the infamous Gunpowder Plot in England in 1605 to blow up the Houses of Parliament and assassinate the king.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Antonia Fraser gives a judicious account of events in her *Faith and Treason: The Story of the Gunpowder Plot* (New York: Nan A. Talese/Doubleday, 1996).

In our own day Jesuit political activity of various kinds has stirred controversy within and outside the Society. Superiors asked Fr. Robert Drinan, S.J., to surrender his seat in the U.S. Congress as a representative from Massachusetts after he had served in that body from 1971 to 1981. Jesuits in Central America were charged with undue intervention in politics in the 1970s and 1980s. The *Complementary Norms* of 1995 inform us that "[a]ny realistic desire to engage in the promotion of justice in our mission will mean some kind of involvement in civic activity; but this will make our preaching of the Gospel more meaningful and its acceptance easier."<sup>2</sup> Jesuits are summoned to labor "to infuse Christian principles into public life," and to participate in "social mobilization," not, however, to engage in "partisan politics." In "truly exceptional circumstances," Father General may grant permission for a Jesuit to hold a position in government, a political party, or a labor union.<sup>3</sup>

This essay looks at how the Society dealt with political activities of Jesuits at a crucial juncture in its history. It can instruct us about the opportunities, the pitfalls, and the ambiguities associated with Jesuit involvement in politics, and it suggests that we cannot expect to avoid disagreements among Jesuits about political activity and political programs.

## The Thirty Years War

Perhaps at no other time did Jesuit involvement in politics come to the fore as an issue to such an extent as it did during the Thirty Years War, when Jesuit confessors of princes enjoyed what was probably their greatest political influence. Indeed, allegations from this period that Jesuits exercised power from behind the scenes did not lack substance. The Thirty Years War was the first European-wide war, engulfing as it did all the major European states, except England and Russia, as well as many of the lesser principalities. Only the momentous Peace of Westphalia of 1648 brought the war to a close, after five years of negotiations at the first general European peace conference.<sup>4</sup> Jesuits were to be found especially as confessors and preachers at Catholic courts in Vienna, Munich, Paris, and Madrid, and they often closely identified with the interests of the courts. Muzio Vitelleschi, a native

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<sup>2</sup> *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms: A Complete English Translation of the Latin Text* (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996), no. 249 (p. 275).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 301 (pp. 309 f).

<sup>4</sup> Two solid treatments of the Thirty Years War are Geoffrey Parker, *The Thirty Years War*, 2 ed. (London and New York, 1997), and Ronald G. Asch, *The Thirty Years War: The Holy Roman Empire and Europe, 1618–48* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

Roman and superior general at the time, faced the task of maintaining unity in the Society at this time of nascent “national spirit,” a term that often appears in his correspondence.

Complexity of cause and effect obviously characterized a war of such duration and magnitude. Religion undoubtedly played a major role in the conflict, but not necessarily the predominant one—and certainly not in the later years of the war. The war comprised and mingled three basic conflicts. First, the German conflict embroiled the numerous near-sovereign principalities and cities of the Holy Roman Empire, virtually coextensive with Germany, in knotty religious and constitutional issues. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) had legalized Lutheranism in Germany, thus allowing two Christian confessions in the empire. But the peace agreement left room for differing interpretations, especially regarding rights to Church property and to freedom of worship. Eventually, these differences spilled over into legal, political, and then military confrontations. Protestant and Catholic defensive alliances formed.

The second conflict pitted the Dutch against the Spanish in the Eighty Years War for Dutch Independence. The Twelve Years Truce of 1609 lapsed in 1621, and last-minute efforts to prolong it failed; so the conflict in the Netherlands merged with the German war.

Finally, the Bourbon Most Christian King of France challenged the Habsburg Most Catholic King of Spain’s predominance in Europe in a rivalry that had cast its shadow over Europe since the late fifteenth century. Gradually, the France of Louis XIII (1615–42), with Cardinal Richelieu as first minister (1624–42), achieved an ascendancy over its competitor.

Historians have frequently divided the war into four phases. The first opened with the Defenestration of Prague in 1618, when an organized Protestant mob pushed their way up the staircase of the Hradschin Castle, grabbed three government officials suspected of encouraging a policy of re-Catholicizing Bohemia and fostering absolutism in that land; the intruders pitched the ministers out the window to certain death, as the assailants thought. But all three landed—miraculously as Catholics claimed—on a dung heap and walked away unhurt. The incident provoked a rebellion in Bohemia, as it was meant to do, which spread to neighboring Habsburg lands in Austria and Hungary.

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*In “truly exceptional circumstances,”  
Father General may grant permission  
for a Jesuit to hold a position  
in government, a political party,  
or a labor union.*

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As princes intervened on either side, the war expanded into Germany, where it brought to the boiling point the long-simmering dispute between Catholics and Protestants over the interpretation of the Peace of Augsburg. During this second, German, phase from 1625 to 1630, Catholic forces led by Maximilian, elector of Bavaria (1598–1651), and the Habsburg emperor Ferdinand II (1619–37), won a clear upper hand after occupying much of central and northern Germany by early 1628. As a result, Ferdinand issued the controversial Edict of Restitution in March 1629, unilaterally ordering the return to the Catholics of all the Church lands that the Protestants had seized—illegally, as the Catholic claimed—since 1555. Had this measure been fully implemented, it would have transferred an enormous amount of property from Protestants to Catholics and greatly weakened many smaller Protestant principalities.

The invasion of Germany in 1630 by the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus, the Protestant Lion of the North, launched the third, Swedish, phase of the war, from 1630 to 1635. Supported by France, Gustavus came,

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*In the Constitutions Ignatius affirmed the Society's need to obtain "the good will and charity of all, . . . especially of those whose favorable or unfavorable attitude toward it is of great importance for opening or closing the gate leading to the service of God and the good of souls."*

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he declared, to protect his fellow Protestants from Habsburg tyranny. The two Protestant states hitherto loyal to the emperor, Brandenburg and Saxony, now under pressure went over to Gustavus, and he defeated the Catholic forces decisively at Breitenfeld near Leipzig in September 1631. This battle reversed the whole course of the war, allowing the Swedes to occupy large areas of west and south Germany, including most of Bavaria. The Battle of Nördlingen in September 1634 reestablished a balance between the two sides and resulted in the Peace of Prague of 1635, which brought back to the side of the emperor nearly all the German Protestant states at the price of Catholic concessions regarding the terms of the Edict. A minor

conflict between Spain and France from 1628 to 1631, each seeking to bolster its position in northern Italy, foreshadowed the final, or French, phase of the war.

This last phase, from 1635 to 1648, saw the French join openly with their Swedish and German Protestant allies. Gradually, the Franco-Swedish armies prevailed in the field, and the long negotiations from 1643 to 1648 resulted in the Peace of Westphalia.



## Jesuit Court Confessors

In 1615 the Seventh General Congregation of the Society elected as its superior general Muzio Vitelleschi, a native Roman and the first general from a region not under the control of Spain. He was to govern the Society until 1645. In early 1617, shortly after his election and just before the outbreak of the war, in his first circular letter to all Jesuits, Vitelleschi declared that he found the Society to be in essentially sound health, "robust," as he put it. But one concern was the complaint often heard that Jesuits were "more prudent men, men of politics (*políticos*) than solidly spiritual."<sup>5</sup> Not mentioned directly in the letter was Jesuit involvement in politics, but this had already become an issue.

The first Jesuit to serve as confessor to a prince had taken up his task at the command of Ignatius himself. In 1552 King John III of Portugal requested a regular confessor. In spite of their initial reluctance, Ignatius directed one of two Portuguese Jesuits, Diego Mirón or Luis Gonçalves da Câmara, to assume the responsibility. He gave two reasons. First, the Society ought to administer the sacraments to those of high as well as low station, and especially in this case, because King John supported the ministries of the young Society to an unusually generous degree. Ignatius also hoped to secure assistance for a further Jesuit project, a mission to Ethiopia. Second, and more significant, the greater good and service of God called for acceptance of the position. "For all members of the body share in the advantage of the head, and all subjects in that of their rulers. So the spiritual help given to Their Highnesses should be esteemed more valuable than that given to other people." Nor should the concomitant dangers, in this case the allurements of the court, deter Jesuits from assuming such positions. God would protect them against temptations provided they sincerely sought to serve him, and courtiers would recognize that they did not pursue offices or honors for themselves.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequently, in the *Constitutions* Ignatius affirmed the Society's need to obtain "the good will and charity of all, . . . especially of those whose favorable or unfavorable attitude toward it is of great importance for opening or closing the gate leading to the service of God and the good of souls." A prince could greatly foster or easily thwart ministry in his lands. But at the same time "there should neither be nor be seen partiality to one

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<sup>5</sup> Jan. 2, 1617, *Epistolae Quattuor Adm. R.P.N. Mutii Vitelleschi* (n.p., n.d.), 1-24.

<sup>6</sup> Letter of Ignatius Loyola to Diego Mirón, Feb. 1, 1553, in *St. Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings*, trans. and ed. Joseph A. Munitz and Philip Endean (Harmondsworth, 1996), no. 30 (pp. 248-50); Bernhard Duhr, *Die Jesuiten an den deutschen Fürstenhöfen des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg, 1901), 2 f.

side or another among Christian princes or rulers, but in its stead a universal love which embraces in our Lord all parties.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the *Constitutions* also summoned Jesuits “to abstain as far as possible from all secular employments,” so that they might devote themselves more fully to the spiritual pursuits of their vocation.<sup>8</sup> What was to happen when princes, benefactors, or family members pressed Jesuits to engage in secular and especially political matters?

Problems were not slow to arise as the Society rapidly expanded. The Fifth General Congregation of 1593–94 issued a general decree on Jesuit involvement in politics. By then a few members of the Society had figured in the French Religious Wars from 1562 onwards and in the mounting of armadas against the English.<sup>9</sup> “No Jesuit,” the decree read, “was for any reason to dare or presume to become involved in the public and secular affairs of princes which have to do with, as they say, reason of state.” Nor were they to deal with political matters, no matter who might urge them to do so. The canonical penalties for violation of the decree were ineligibility to hold office in the Society and, if one already did hold office, removal from office and deprivation of the right to vote within the Society.<sup>10</sup> Some were not happy with this decree. The Italian Antonio Possevino challenged the General, Aquaviva, on the issue. He had himself undertaken a number of diplomatic missions for the Pope, and he now drew up a paper containing

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<sup>7</sup> Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, ed. with a commentary by George E. Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), no. 823 f. (p. 337).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 591 (p. 263). The direct topic here is acting as “executors of wills” or “procurators of civil affairs” rather than political involvement. The *Constitutions* did allow for exceptions; e.g. see no. 592 (p. 264).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, A. Lynn Martin, *Henry III and the Jesuit Politicians* (Geneva: Droz, 1973), and John Bossy, “The Heart of Robert Persons,” in *The Reckoned Expense: Edmund Campion and the Early English Jesuits*, ed. Thomas M. McCoog, S.J. (Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell Press, 1996): 141–58; and Francisco de Borja Medina, “Intrigues of a Scottish Jesuit at the Spanish Court: Unpublished Letter of William Crichton to Claudio Aquaviva (Madrid, 1590–1592), in Bossy, *Heart of Robert Persons*, 215–48.

<sup>10</sup> “. . . ne, scilicet, quispiam publicis et sæcularibus Principum negotiis, quæ ad rationem status, ut vocant, pertinent, ulla ratione se immiscere, nec etiam, quantumvis per quoscumque requisitus aut rogatus, ejusmodi politicas res tractandi curam suscipere audeat vel præsumat,” in *Institutum Societatis Iesu* (hereafter *InstSI*), 3 vols. (Florence, 1893), 2:288, d. 79; the corresponding canon 12 (p. 547) repeated virtually the same words; Duhr, *Die Jesuiten*, 4f. See *For Matters of Greater Moment: The First Thirty Jesuit General Congregations: A Brief History and a Translation of the Decrees* (hereafter *Matters*), ed. and trans. John W. Padberg, S.J., Martin D. O’Keefe, S.J., and John L. McCarthy, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1994), 200, 214.



more than twenty examples that, he contended, proved that the decree was not consonant with the Society's practice.<sup>11</sup> Jesuits themselves were obviously not of one mind about political involvement.

Under continued pressure, Aquaviva in 1602 published an *Instruction for Confessors of Princes*, which the Sixth General Congregation of 1608 ratified, thus making it the official position of the Society.<sup>12</sup> The document laid down norms for the confessor's style of life. He was ordinarily to reside, for example, in a Jesuit community. But its principal goal was to secure for the Society the advantages accruing from a position as court confessor while avoiding the disadvantages. This goal was difficult enough to achieve in theory, let alone to implement in practice. The key passage was ambiguous. The confessor, it read, "should

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be careful lest he become involved in external and political matters, mindful of what the Fifth General Congregation had severely prohibited . . . ; he should deal only with those affairs which pertain to the conscience of the prince or are related to it, or to certain pious works."<sup>13</sup> But how could one remove from the domain of conscience all "external and political matters?" Furthermore, the confessor was to avoid even the appearance of exercising political power, for such perceptions severely harmed the Society. At all costs he was to shun entanglements in princely rivalries or among factions at court.

Aquaviva's instruction long served as the principal document issued by the Society as a norm for confessors of princes. The Seventh General

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<sup>11</sup> "Dubii proposti dal P. Possevino l'anno 1594 circa il decreto del non trattar cose di stato," *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu* (henceforth, ARSI), Congregationes 20b, ff. 342-44. I am grateful to Father László Szilas, S.J., of the Jesuit Historical Institute in Rome, who called my attention to this document and provided me with a transcription of it. For one of Possevino's diplomatic missions, see John Patrick Donnelly, S.J., "Antonio Possevino, S.J., as Papal Mediator between Emperor Rudolf II and King Stephan Báthory," *Archivum historicum Societatis Iesu* 69 (2000): 3-56.

<sup>12</sup> "De Confessariis Principum," *InstSI* 3:281-4, 2:297; see Padberg et al, *Matters*, 226, d. 21.

<sup>13</sup> "Caveat, ne se implicet externis negotiis ac politicis, memor eorum quae a quinta Congregatione generali severissime praescribuntur canone 12 et 13; sed in ea solum incumbat, quae ad Principis conscientiam pertinent, vel ad illam referuntur, aut in alia certa pia opera" (*InstSI* 3:282, n. 4).

Congregation of 1615, which elected Vitelleschi, tried to clarify what was meant by "external and political matters." "Examples can be," the congregation stated, citing responses of Aquaviva to queries, "what bears upon treaties of princes among themselves, or rights and successions to thrones, or foreign or civil wars." The Jesuit was prohibited from being "involved in public consultations or negotiations about these or similar issues."<sup>14</sup> This last provision appeared to allow for advice that was given to a prince in confession itself or in a private forum. Vitelleschi himself soon was called upon to interpret and to attempt to enforce Aquaviva's instruction in the upheaval of the Thirty Years War.

As confessor of the ruler, a Jesuit belonged to the court but not to the government, a distinction often without clear boundaries in the seventeenth century. The function of the confessor was not clearly defined apart from regularly hearing the prince's sacramental confession. Obviously closed to us is what was said under the seal of confession, but it is unlikely that the counsel that a confessor gave in this forum differed from that provided elsewhere. The confessor did enjoy regular access to the center of power, a coveted privilege. His own personality and convictions, even more so those of the prince, and sometimes other circumstances, determined the extent of his influence. Emperor Ferdinand III (1637-57) differed greatly in this respect from his father, Ferdinand II; he paid much less heed to his confessor, which does not amount to saying that he was less religious. Cardinal Richelieu attempted to exercise control over the confessors of Louis XIII in France (1610-43), and several times he arranged for their dismissal.

### Vitelleschi's Policy

To follow Vitelleschi and the court confessors through the war is not possible within the limits of this essay.<sup>15</sup> We can only note a few highlights.

From early on, the General established as a principle that political activity in the interests of the Church was not only allowed but to be

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<sup>14</sup> *InstSI* 2:332, d. 46; 2:553, canon 13; Padberg et al., *Matters*, 267, d. 46.

<sup>15</sup> I will spare the reader by using footnotes sparingly. Those interested in further documentation may consult my *Maximilian von Bayern, Adam Contzen, S.J. und die Gegenreformation in Deutschland, 1624-1635* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1975), *Religion and Politics in the Age of the Counterreformation: Emperor Ferdinand II, William Lamormaini, S.J., and the Formation of Imperial Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), and *The Jesuits and the Thirty Years War* (awaiting publication).

The correspondence of Father General Vitelleschi is found in the ARSI.



encouraged. He stated this clearly when on June 29, 1621, he instructed the Spanish royal preacher, Jerónimo de Florencia, to intervene at court in order to secure religious freedom for the Catholics of the Valtelline, a territory in the Swiss Alps contested by Catholic and Protestant factions. Although involvement with matters of reason of state was normally foreign to the religious vocation, he wrote, when it was a question of preserving the faith or advancing the neighbor's spiritual good or the glory of God, then the Jesuit in a position to do so not only could but was obliged to intervene in political matters. The contest with heretics justified intervention in politics by the Jesuit court confessors.

Even regarding issues where the interests of the Church were not directly in play, Vitelleschi recognized the wide overlap in practice of matters of politics and matters of conscience, and he permitted and even advocated action by court confessors where this was the case. In response to a suggestion in 1642 by Johannes Vervaux, confessor of Elector Maximilian of Bavaria, that the rule prohibiting Jesuits from participating in political affairs be modified, the General declared that there was no need for this. When a proper moral judgment or the formation of conscience required it, a Jesuit confessor could concern himself with matters of state and even be present at council meetings, provided that he remained silent and did not vote in the council. This Vervaux could take as "a rule of conduct."

What Vitelleschi regularly opposed forcefully was Jesuits' holding government office or even appearing to hold it. The objection to this came out most evidently in a prolonged effort to end the various governmental activities of Hernando Salazar, confessor of the count-duke of Olivares, chief minister of Philip IV of Spain (1621–65). In 1631 Salazar resigned as confessor of Olivares to devote himself to other activities. According to the papal nuncio writing in 1631, he was the soul of the anti-Roman faction in Madrid; at the time he served prominently on a committee that prepared a report entitled "Abuses of Rome and the Nunciature." A specialist in finance, he was credited with the idea for the "papel sellado," a highly unpopular stamp tax. His role in the development of taxes made him "one of the most unpopular figures in Spain," and he was later satirized at the Madrid Carnival of 1637.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, this activity did not enhance the Society's reputation in Vitelleschi's eyes.

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<sup>16</sup> On Salazar, see John H. Elliott, *The Count-Duke of Olivares: The Statesman in an Age of Decline* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 115, 141, 268 f., 416 f., 427–29, 556.

## Lamormaini, Contzen, and the Catholic Offensive in Germany

Vitelleschi fully supported the militant Jesuits William Lamormaini and Adam Contzen, confessors of the Habsburg emperor Ferdinand II and Elector Maximilian of Bavaria, respectively, as they insistently supported, often in the face of opposition from governmental councilors, a campaign to roll back heresy in Germany. Both took office as confessor in 1624, saw their influence peak between 1629 and 1631, and then departed the scene in 1635, Lamormaini through effective exclusion from politics by the new emperor and Contzen through death.

Lamormaini, a native Luxemburger born in 1570, and Ferdinand II had become genuine friends. While the former served as rector of the Jesuit university in Graz from 1613 to 1621, the future emperor, who was at this time an archduke, governed the territory of Inner Austria from his residence there. Later in the early 1630s, at a trying time for both of them and when the latter was under heavy fire, Ferdinand reassured his confessor, in words that certainly harked back to the years in Graz, "So long, my Father, have we been companions through life, no one will separate us from each other."<sup>17</sup>

Three years after Ferdinand's election as Holy Roman Emperor in 1619 and his move to Vienna, Lamormaini was named rector of the Jesuit college there and two years later the emperor's confessor. Shortly after his appointment as confessor, Vitelleschi forwarded to Lamormaini a copy of Aquaviva's *Instruction*, and he expressed his "incredible joy of soul" at the emperor's vow that "he would undertake whatever the circumstances seemed to permit" for the good of religion, "not only gladly but with great joy and pleasure." Ferdinand took this vow in the imperial chapel on the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1624, as Lamormaini reported to Vitelleschi.

Nearly one thousand letters from Vitelleschi to Lamormaini survive in the Roman Archives of the Jesuits as registers, or draft copies, for the years 1624 to 1635. A number of these were letters of recommendation for Italian noblemen who sought a favorable reception as they passed through Vienna or a post in the imperial military. But many were of considerable political significance. Very little of the correspondence in the other direction, from Vienna to Rome, remains.

Contzen, born in a village not far from Aachen in 1571, had taught theology principally in Würzburg and Mainz before being summoned to Munich by Maximilian of Bavaria. A prolific author, in 1620 Contzen

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<sup>17</sup> Eustachius Sthaäl, "Vita Lamormaini," Rome, in ARSI, Vitæ 139, ff. 66, 121. The author of this manuscript life of 122 folios categorizes this quotation as approximate.



published a major work of political thought, the *Ten Books on Politics*, and this brought him to Maximilian's attention. Like Lamormaini a strong personality, shortly after his arrival in Munich he came into conflict with members of Maximilian's privy council over policy toward the Prince's rival, Frederick V, the deposed ruler of the Palatinate. Contzen assumed an uncompromising stand against concessions and prevailed over the elector's leading jurist, resulting in mutual written recriminations that required the personal intervention of the Prince to end them. The choleric Contzen sometimes branded his opponents at court as unchristian. He received 125 letters from Vitelleschi during his term as confessor, but he seems to have written the General nearly once a week.

Not infrequently complaints about the alleged political activity of Jesuits, especially the court confessors, reached Rome from other Jesuits in the field. Vitelleschi invariably stood by the confessor, except in the case of the French Jesuit Nicholas Caussin, who will be discussed later. The General realized that the confessors often found themselves in a delicate position. In 1629 some Munich Jesuits asserted that many identified Contzen with some unpopular tax measures imposed by Maximilian, and that

this association impeded the Society's pastoral ministries. Vitelleschi then recommended to Contzen that he attempt to keep secret his counsel to the Prince and in controversial matters, especially regarding taxes, to consult with other Jesuits before giving the Prince an opinion. Contzen's

offer to resign as confessor showed the seriousness of the situation. Satisfied with Contzen's explanation, which does not survive, Vitelleschi refused even to consider his resignation and instructed the provincial to take measures against Contzen's detractors in Munich.<sup>18</sup>

Catholic forces, surprisingly, posted a number of victories during the early period of the Thirty Years War, such as at the White Mountain outside Prague in 1620 or at Lutter am Barenberg in 1626, so that they controlled large areas of central and northern Germany by early 1628. Increasingly, Contzen, Lamormaini, and other militants discerned in these victories a divine summons to reclaim from the Protestants all the ecclesiasti-

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<sup>18</sup> Bireley, *Maximilian von Bayern*, 49 f.

cal lands that the Protestants had seized—illegally, Catholics argued—since the Peace of Augsburg of 1555.

On September 7, 1627, Contzen urged Maximilian to action. “Without a doubt the time is especially suitable. If it is allowed to pass unexploited, it will be difficult to recover it again. . . . On the other hand, [the only reason for] opposing [this venture] is . . . that it is hated [by the Protestants]. But because the cause truly is the cause of God, he will easily shelter you against the expressions of human hatred. The prayers and love of the Catholics will easily compensate for this hatred.”<sup>19</sup> Lamormaini drew up plans for a vast expansion of the Society’s influence throughout northern Germany through colleges to be financed from the revenues of the recovered Church lands.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, under date of March 6, 1629, Emperor Ferdinand II issued the fateful Edict of Restitution, in which the religious character of the war came most clearly to light. The Edict called for a massive transfer of Church property in the empire from Protestants back to Catholics and even threatened the viability of smaller Protestant states. For Contzen the goal of the war “consisted in the restitution of the ecclesiastical lands,” as he wrote in a

memorandum. But ominous signs pointed toward a change in the fortunes of war when the Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus landed with an army on the coast of north Germany in July 1630 and started to advance southward.

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*[The Catholic militants] argued that God had given the Catholics a providential opportunity to restore justice in the empire, that is, to return to observance of the Peace of Augsburg as interpreted by the Catholics.*

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From early June to mid-November 1630, an electoral convention gathered in Regensburg. Attending this meeting was the emperor with the seven princes of the empire who served as imperial electors. It amounted to a European mini peace conference, and most European states including Spain and France dispatched diplomats to protect their interests. Jesuits came too

in the entourages of various princes, nearly thirty of them crowding as guests into the local Jesuit college. During the early days of the convention, Lamormaini and Contzen met with the Jesuit confessors of two other rulers, the prince-archbishops of Mainz and Cologne, at Amberg, a day’s walk from

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<sup>19</sup> Contzen to Maximilian, Sept. 7, 1627, Munich, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Kasten schwarz, 773.

<sup>20</sup> Sthaäl, “Vita Lamormaini,” in ARSI, Vitæ 139, ff. 56–58.



Regensburg. Lamormaini reassured the German assistant in Rome, "God has been the helper and protector of the emperor up to now and will be, I hope, in the future." Reinhard Ziegler, confessor of Mainz, did not fully share this optimism. Contzen and Lamormaini acted as go-betweens for Maximilian and Ferdinand at a crucial point in negotiations, but they disagreed violently when the two princes proposed different schemes for the reorganization of the imperial military. Contzen later circulated a manuscript bitinglly critical of both the Spanish and imperial armies, and his attacks on the Habsburgs with his acidic pen in the dark years that lay ahead drove Lamormaini to beseech Vitelleschi to dismiss him from the Society. Instead, the General made excuses for him.

Despite the advance of Gustavus from the north, the Catholic states refused any compromise on the Edict of Restitution, and the Protestants manifested a similar stubbornness. This represented a victory for the Catholic militants led by Contzen and Lamormaini. They argued that God had given the Catholics a providential opportunity to restore justice in the empire, that is, to return to observance of the Peace of Augsburg as interpreted by the Catholics. For the Catholic princes to refuse to respond to this summons was, in effect, to sin and to sully their reputation as defenders of the faith.

In vain did Catholic moderates, including Ferdinand's first minister, Johann Ulrich von Eggenberg, argue that the wiser course called for some concessions to the Protestants in order to consolidate Catholic gains. They warned the Catholics not to push their advantage excessively. Theologically, the moderates contended that the militant position implied a divine revelation in support of it. To be sure, they agreed, God had called upon the Hebrews in biblical times to wage war against their enemies and promised his aid to them; but, in the face of the persistent assertions of militants, they denied that a parallel existed between the present situation and the religious wars of the Old Testament. Later, Maximilian of Bavaria attributed the failure to reach a compromise on the Edict at Regensburg to the opposition of the Jesuit militants.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Discurs uber des Reichs Statum," sometime after 1637, published in Dieter Albrecht, *Die auswärtige Politik Maximilians von Bayern 1618-1635* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1962), appendix, 379-81.

## France

Militants also hoped for assistance from Catholic France, which intervened directly in the German conflict only in 1635 and then on the side of Sweden and the Protestant states. There did exist in France a party that tended to support the German Catholics, but Cardinal Richelieu, at the helm of French policy, generally sympathized with and supported the anti-Habsburg forces in the empire. As he viewed it, the German and Spanish Habsburgs used religion to cloak imperial ambitions.

From 1626 to 1631 the Jesuit confessor of Louis XIII, Jean Suffren, shared the views of the cardinal, and he also rejected Lamormaini's conception of the role of the confessor when Lamormaini suggested that they attempt to work together for a peace, for he perceived that this cooperation would be a victory for the militants in Germany. Suffren recognized Lamormaini's zeal and good intentions; but he severely criticized Jesuits who, he wrote, abandoned the ministries proper to their vocation, like preaching, teaching, and hearing confessions, and became involved in politics. Such pursuits led them into activities foreign to their vocation, where their inexperience caused them to fall victim to deception and manipulation. This in turn undermined the credibility of their traditional ministries. Suffren then defended vigorously the policy of Richelieu in Italy, where it clashed with objectives of the emperor.<sup>22</sup> Throughout his tenure as confessor he cooperated with the cardinal, often reporting to Richelieu about the king's shifting moods when the cardinal and Louis were separated.

The French Jesuits as well as Vitelleschi recognized their dependence upon Louis XIII and consequently on Richelieu. The Society faced ardent Catholic enemies in France among the *parlementaires* and diocesan clergy, who harbored Gallican sentiment and were suspicious of the Society's bond with Rome, and among university faculties, who resented the competition of the Jesuit schools. The Society had been expelled from most of France from 1594 to 1603, and many Jesuits greatly feared a second expulsion. They looked to the king and to the cardinal for protection. This explains why there is not one word of criticism of the cardinal in all Vitelleschi's correspondence and why an unusual obsequiousness marks his letters to Richelieu.

One Jesuit confessor of Louis, Nicholas Caussin, attempted to unseat Richelieu because he judged that the cardinal's policies were disrupt-

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<sup>22</sup> Suffren to Lamormaini, Jan. 9, 1630, in *Les Papiers: Correspondance et papiers d'état: Section politique extérieur, Empire allemand*, by Armand-Jean du Plessis, cardinal de Richelieu, ed. Adolf Wild (Paris, 1982), vol. 1 (1616-29): 586-9, no. 306.

tive of peace efforts in Europe and imposed heavy burdens upon the French people, especially the poor. He held the office of confessor from March to December 1637, when he found himself dismissed, humiliated, and exiled to the college at Quimper in far-off Brittany until the death of the cardinal in 1642 and Louis the next year. Neither Vitelleschi nor the French Jesuits gave him any public support.<sup>23</sup> Richelieu himself realized that he had badly misjudged Caussin when he appointed him confessor to the king on the basis of his *Holy Court*, first published in 1624 and frequently republished and translated throughout the seventeenth century. This hefty volume attempted to show how one could live the full Christian life in the world of the court.

## Spain

The Spanish count-duke of Olivares persistently criticized Lamormaini because of the confessor's opposition to Spanish policy, especially in the conflict over the succession in the strategically crucial linked-dukies of Mantua and Montferrat in northern Italy. After the duke died on Christmas Day, 1627, leaving no clear heir, both the Spaniards and the French aggressively championed their respective candidates. The issue was of great legal and political complexity, and it took on European importance because it involved the struggle of the Spaniards and the French for control of northern Italy. Responding in part to papal pressure and in part to fear of weakening the forces needed to implement the Edict in the north, Lamormaini successfully obstructed for a time the efforts of the Spanish party in Vienna to gain imperial political and military support in Italy.

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In the fall of 1631 Olivares renewed his campaign to pressure Vitelleschi to restrict the activity of Lamormaini in Vienna. Seven prominent Spanish Jesuits were summoned to Madrid in mid-November. There the count-duke explained to them the king's grievances and threatened severe

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<sup>23</sup> See Camille de Rochementeix, *Nicholas Caussin, Confesseur de Louis XIII, et le Cardinal de Richelieu: Documents inédits* (Paris, 1911), and the account in my forthcoming *The Jesuits and the Thirty Years War*.



measures if the Society did not take action. According to him, the Jesuits, despite all the benefits they had received from the Spanish Crown, colluded against Spanish interests. Lamormaini, and even Vitelleschi himself out of a desire to please the Pope, favored France. Olivares intimated that the support of the king of Spain might carry more weight, seeing that Spanish possessions contained twenty-four provinces of the Society. Should the fathers fail to act, Olivares promised measures that would increase royal control of the Society in Spain, such as the demand that a special commissioner of the Society be appointed with extensive responsibility for the Spanish Jesuits.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, he warned that Spanish ministers of state would be forbidden to make their confession to Jesuits, because the fathers used the sacrament to exercise undue influence. One of the Jesuits present, the spiritual writer Louis de La Palma, advised Vitelleschi that the government was serious in its demands and urged him to avert harm to the Society in Spain.

Vitelleschi calmly defended himself in a letter of February 7, 1632, to the seven Spanish Jesuits, and at the General's behest, Lamormaini wrote to both Olivares and to the king to explain his actions. Even though Olivares did not follow through with his threats, perhaps due to the influence of his new confessor, the Jesuit Francisco Aguado, the letters did not content him, and relations between Madrid and Vitelleschi remained cool, largely because of Lamormaini in Vienna.

## Reversal of Fortune in Germany

Meanwhile, the program of the militants in Germany collapsed with the resounding victory of Gustavus Adolphus over the Catholic forces at Breitenfeld in Saxony in early September 1631. This battle saw the fortunes of war pass to the other side. Prior to it, the two major German states that had up to then stood with the emperor, Saxony and Brandenburg, went over to the Swedes, largely because of the Catholic refusal to make concessions regarding the terms of the Edict. Gustavus advanced into Bavaria in 1632 and for a time occupied Munich itself, compelling Maximilian, and Contzen with him, to flee to Braunau.

This marked the nadir for the Catholic militants in Germany, and especially for Contzen and Lamormaini. Contzen defended his position in a long manuscript, "A Consideration on the Persecution of the Church in

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<sup>24</sup> These measures were reminiscent of those threatened by Philip II in the previous century.



Germany.”<sup>25</sup> Superiors prohibited its publication because of its sharp criticism of the German clergy, to whose sins Contzen attributed the Catholic defeat. Vitelleschi now cautioned him about excessive involvement in politics.<sup>26</sup> For Lamormaini the situation proved worse. The primate of Hungary, Cardinal Peter Pazmany, a former Jesuit and colleague of Lamormaini at the university in Graz, reported that nearly the whole kingdom called for Lamormaini’s dismissal from court. But Ferdinand remained loyal to him.

At this time, Vitelleschi did raise questions with Lamormaini and criticize some of his actions. Complaints had been coming into Rome about him “from nearly all the provinces of Germany,” Vitelleschi wrote the confessor on February 25, 1632. Many in Vienna blamed the Jesuits for the war and the calamities it brought; the superior of the professed house where Lamormaini resided wrote in the same vein to Rome.

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Vitelleschi laid before Lamormaini charges against him without necessarily personally espousing them, following a procedure that he frequently employed when dealing with complaints against Jesuits. Lamormaini’s frankness angered Spanish officials. But the main grievance, Vitelleschi indicated, was undue intrusion into political affairs. Not only did Lamormaini allegedly give his opinion on issues to Ferdinand and the competent ministers, he also canvassed support and aggressively attacked those in disagreement with him. When Ferdinand asked Lamormaini to query other Jesuits on an issue, the confessor sought to persuade them to his view; and if they did not come over to his way of thinking, he tried to prevent them from communicating their opinion to the emperor. This violated the *Instruction for Confessors of Princes*, Vitelleschi

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<sup>25</sup> “De Persecutione Ecclesiae Christi per Germaniam Consideratio,” Munich, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Jesuitica 81, ff. 126–226.

<sup>26</sup> Vitelleschi to Contzen, Jan. 10 and Apr. 10, 1632, in ARSI, Germaniae Superioris 6, ff. 419, 448.

reminded Lamormaini, which directed the confessor to consult with other Jesuits on difficult issues and encourage the ruler to do so too.

Yet there was never any question of removing Lamormaini from office. Ferdinand would never have permitted it. At the height of Lamormaini's troubles, the emperor assured him, "I hope in my God, and I await the confusion of his enemies and of all the political councilors." At the triennial provincial congregation, or meeting, of the Austrian Province in April 1633, a few fathers raised their voices against Lamormaini, but Vitelleschi defended him as did many other Jesuits of the Austrian Province.<sup>27</sup>

Gradually, the military situation in the empire reached a certain balance, especially after the Catholic victory at Nördlingen in September 1634, and this led eventually to the Peace of Prague of 1635. This agreement between the emperor and most of the German states, Protestant and Catholic, did not end the war, largely because of the active intervention of France that year in support of the Swedes and the unreconciled Protestant principalities; but it did represent the surrender of the militant Catholic program by both Ferdinand and Maximilian of Bavaria. Prior to his acceptance of the Peace, Ferdinand convoked a conference of theologians in Vienna from February 5 to 16, 1635, to determine whether he could sign it in good conscience. Lamormaini spoke more than any of the other twenty-three participants; but the great majority, including two Jesuits, took sides against him. They rejected his argument from divine providence; moreover, though many affirmed the need for theologians to lay down the relevant moral principles on war and peace, they considered that it was up to the lay councilors to apply them in practice.

Contzen died that same year and Lamormaini saw his political influence greatly diminished, though he remained close to the emperor until Ferdinand's death in early 1637.

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<sup>27</sup> According to the Jesuit Constitutions, a provincial congregation or meeting was to be held every three years. There the senior members of the province voted on two matters. They determined whether there was reason to convoke a general congregation representative of the whole Society, and they elected two representatives or "procurators" who would accompany the provincial superior to Rome and vote for the province on the need for a general congregation. They also carried with them a list of issues or "postulata" that the province congregation wanted to submit for discussion in Rome.



## Gans and Vervaux, New Confessors in Vienna and Munich

The succeeding confessors in Vienna and Munich differed greatly from Lamormaini and Contzen, and from each other.

Shortly after Ferdinand III became emperor in 1637, Johannes Gans became his confessor; previously he had held a position as preacher in Graz and then in St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna. Whereas austerity had marked Lamormaini, Gans obviously enjoyed a hearty dinner and drinks in the company of members of the court. Vitelleschi cautioned him to adopt a modest diet, urbanity of manner, and seriousness of conversation. At this time there were twelve Jesuit priests in all assigned to the court in Vienna as confessors or preachers, with six brothers to assist them.

Complaints soon reached Rome about dissension at the professed house where the Jesuits of the court resided. The secretary of Malatesta Baglione, the nuncio in Vienna, sized up the situation accurately in a letter to the secretary of state on March 7, 1637, shortly after Gans's appointment. Lamormaini, he wrote, influenced the emperor by placing everything in the context of conscience. The new emperor asserted that he intended to proceed differently. At the Diet of Regensburg in 1641, Gans claimed that the Edict of Restitution was principally responsible for the troubles of the empire; it had been fashioned by a few well-intentioned and zealous but politically inexperienced advisers of the emperor. So Gans evaluated the centerpiece of Lamormaini's program for the restoration of Catholicism in the empire.

As confessor, Gans continued to have access to the emperor, but he was excluded from political deliberations and was not on good terms with the principal minister, Maximilian von Trausmannsdorf. Gans accepted this situation, if reluctantly at times, and, unlike Lamormaini, he certainly never advocated a program. Overall, ecclesiastics enjoyed less influence in Vienna under Ferdinand III than they had under his father.

Over in Munich Johannes Vervaux succeeded Contzen as confessor to Maximilian of Bavaria in 1635. In contrast to Gans, he was to enjoy at least as much influence as his predecessor. He periodically took part in sessions of the privy council, and even undertook at least one major diplomatic mission for the prince, to Paris in 1645, a task never required of Contzen. But, unlike Contzen, he belonged to the moderate party in Munich and so represented a profound change.

A native of Lorraine and a member of the Lower Rhenish Province, Vervaux had originally come to Munich as confessor to Elizabeth of Lorraine, Maximilian's wife, in 1631. Like Contzen, he began to write the General nearly every week. Vitelleschi noted in 1633 that even though they



both often reported the same facts, Vervaux frequently drew from them "a different hope or fear for the future."

Vervaux finally completed the history of Bavaria, the *Annals of the Bavarian People*, a project that Maximilian had earlier assigned to several Jesuits. It was published in 1662, the year of Vervaux's death.<sup>28</sup> In his treatment of the Electoral Convention of Regensburg of 1630, Vervaux sharply criticized the militant Catholic councilors, including Contzen, though not by name, for their rigid position on the Edict, and he blamed them also for subsequent problems in the empire. Maximilian's adoption of a moderate position in 1635 was not owing to Vervaux, but the Jesuit was in sympathy with this change and evidently fostered it. In the coming decades he encountered severe opposition from some Jesuits, but Vitelleschi consistently upheld him. The superior general had silently moved over into the moderate camp.

## The Eighth General Congregation, 1645–1646

Principally because of the seemingly endless war, no general congregation of the Society had convened since the Seventh General Congregation in 1615, which had elected Vitelleschi. The triennial province congregations

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of 1639 and 1642 manifested a growing sentiment for a general congregation, for never had there been such a long hiatus between them. Two Spanish provinces voted for one in 1639, and two French provinces did the same three years later. Significant minorities in other provinces called for one. The reasons that usually proved persuasive against a congregation were the difficulties of conducting one during the war and the lack of any real crisis in the Society.<sup>29</sup> Excessive national feeling

and attachment to princes were cited as reasons both for and against a general congregation. A minority in the Austrian Province favored one in 1639; they saw it as a chance to foster the fraternal unity that had character-

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<sup>28</sup> The *Annales Boicæ gentis* was published under the name of Johannes Adlzreiter, a Bavarian councilor, because Jesuit superiors feared the backlash from some positions expressed in the book, especially regarding the fourteenth-century Wittelsbach emperor Louis IV, whom the Pope had excommunicated.

<sup>29</sup> The Acta of the provincial congregations are found in the ARSI, Congregationes.

ized the early years of the Society and an opportunity to mitigate excessive allegiance to princes. A similar minority in the Upper German Province saw a congregation as a way to encourage harmony and understanding not only among Jesuits but among princes and states as well.

But in both cases the majority thought otherwise. The Upper German Province feared requests from princes that would threaten the Society's freedom but be difficult to refuse. The French province of Aquitaine weighed in against a general congregation on the grounds that it would turn into a forum for princely conflicts. Still, a minority from the province of Toledo in 1642 looked upon a general congregation as a way to foster international understanding through example. Three years later the two Rhenish provinces made the same point, and some members of the Lower Rhenish Province thought that a congregation would offer the opportunity to take measures against those Jesuits who mingled in politics. This issue did not turn up in the Acta of the provincial congregation of the South German Province, where the confessors had been most active in politics.

Finally the death of Vitelleschi on February 9, 1645, made it necessary to convoke a general congregation to choose his successor. So on the following November 21, the ninety-two members of the Eighth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus assembled in Rome. From all over Europe they came, from countries as distant from one another as England is from Sardinia, as Spain from Lithuania. They even numbered six representatives from across the seas who were already in Europe on other business, one each from India, China, Japan, Mexico, New Granada (present-day Colombia), and Peru. The Eighth General Congregation, the first general congregation to be held since 1615, was to sit longer than any other general congregation, 145 days.<sup>30</sup> A principal issue that drew its attention was involvement of Jesuits in politics or, as the documents often read, in matters of "reason of state." The congregation promulgated no new legislation on the question, but its deliberations and the events that led up to them reveal the ambiguity and internal tensions that had long characterized the Society's policy. Nor are such ambiguity and tensions necessarily to be judged negatively. They may just "go with the territory," then and now.

Provincial congregations were assembled in 1645 in preparation for the general congregation. Again, some provincial congregations deplored excessive national feeling. This appeared most vigorously in a postulate of the Upper Rhenish Province, which included the prince-archbishopric of Mainz, at that time ravaged by the war.

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<sup>30</sup> Padberg et al., *Matters*, xv-xvi, 719 f.



The most destructive plague of national sentiment appears in some areas to creep in to such a degree that not only does the legislation of the Constitutions and Rules against this vice seem to be minimized and little by little annulled, but also that we can fear that the hatred of kings and princes will be justly directed against us and that sometimes there will be a very great division of hearts within the Society itself.

The Austrian Province also complained of exaggerated national sentiment as well as of Jesuit writings critical of princes and rulers. But there was little concern shown in the provincial congregations of 1645 about the direct participation of Jesuits in political affairs.

Only a little more than a year before the opening of the general congregation in 1645, the cardinals had elevated Giovanni Battista Pamphili to the papal throne. Successor of the Barberini pope Urban VIII (1623-44), he took the name Innocent X (1644-55). The new pope took an unprecedented action as the congregation initiated its sessions. Even before the traditional dispatch of the Society's vicar-general, Carlo Sangrio, to seek the Pope's blessing upon the congregation, Innocent presented him with a list of eighteen questions that the delegates were to take up before proceeding to

the election of the new general.<sup>31</sup> This broke sharply with the normal procedure, which called for the election of the new superior general as the first item of business at a congregation. Francisco Aguado, delegate from the province of Toledo, persuaded the fathers to remonstrate with the Pope, but Innocent refused to alter his directive.<sup>32</sup>

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*The congregation promulgated no new legislation on the question, but its deliberations and the events that led up to them reveal the ambiguity and internal tensions that had long characterized the Society's policy.*

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The Pope's questions forced the Jesuits to reevaluate elements of the Jesuit Constitutions themselves, such as the life term of the superior general and the manner of selecting local and provincial superiors. Our concern here is the second item

on the list. The congregation was to consider "whether the Fathers of the Society did not involve themselves in secular matters and business more than the sacred canons and their own Constitutions permitted." The delegates then frequently distinguished, as did many of the documents, between

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<sup>31</sup> For this list, see Antonio Astrain, *Historia de la Compañía de Jesús* (Madrid, 1916), 5:266 n. 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 264-71.



secular affairs involving more properly political activity and other secular matters, such as assisting family or friends in legal matters or interceding with princes on behalf of benefactors. Mingling in political affairs was considered the more serious offense, though the two types of activity often shaded into one another. The congregation dutifully appointed committees to take up each of the Pope's questions.

None of the twenty opinions on political activity produced by the congregation's committees and preserved in the archives advocated new legislation, and nearly all called for stricter enforcement of the current legislation. This could be read as a criticism of Vitelleschi and a failure to take into consideration the situation in which he found himself during the war. But there were significant differences in the understanding of the current legislation and in the possibility of effective enforcement. Some of the most divergent views came from the empire.

The three delegates from the Austrian Province, the province of Lamormaini, claimed that the Society had always been of one mind in this matter and any defects were failures of enforcement.<sup>33</sup> In fact, as we have seen, Johannes Gans, confessor to emperor Ferdinand III, did remain on the margins of politics. But Georg Schelzsius, delegate from the neighboring Bohemian Province, which was also under Habsburg rule, asserted that many of the Jesuits at court, including educators of princes, offended against the Society's legislation, much to the scandal of all. He may have had more in mind personal deportment than political activity; there had been complaints about Gans's alleged carousing and participation in hunting parties. Schelzsius's suggestion was that only men of humility and exemplary character be allowed to serve at court.

Two delegates from the Upper German Province, Laurentius Forer and Nicasius Widuman, the provincial, submitted significant position papers. Forer, born in Lucerne in 1580, taught theology first at Ingolstadt and then for many years at Dillingen, where for twenty-seven years he was confessor to the militant prince-bishop Heinrich von Knöringen. As "Laurentius," Forer had earned a place on the list of the three Jesuits Gustavus Adolphus hoped to hang, Laurentius, Lamormaini, and Paul Laymann, author of *The Way to Peace*, which had provided a legal basis for the Edict of Restitution.

But by this time Forer had moved away from his earlier militancy. In a paper written in 1639, he wrote that "from so many unhappy events of the war, it seems that it does not please God that the Catholic religion be

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<sup>33</sup> Georg Turcovich, provincial, Michael Sumerkher, and Christian Berchiades were the three Austrian delegates. Material from the congregation is found in the ARSI, Congregationes, but it is piecemeal and much of it very difficult to read.

propagated in Germany by [force of] arms, so that another method of resisting heresy must be taken up." One way to counter heresy was more apostolic preaching, that is, sending out missionary preachers into both Catholic and non-Catholic areas. This was the practice of the Society in England, Ireland, Holland, India, and China, that is, in non-Catholic areas. So Boniface and Willibrord had planted the faith in Germany. According to Forer, the bishops of Augsburg and Constance had asked for such missionaries, and two priests had undertaken such preaching with success for two months, but there had been no follow-up.<sup>34</sup>

But according to the opinion Forer prepared for the congregation, one need do more than observe the prescriptions already in effect. These should be shown to the Pope, who should then be asked who in the Society had "enormously sinned and still did sin," so that he could be punished. But if the Pope could not name anyone, then it was evident that the Society was being falsely accused. "For it is clear, that councilors of princes, in order to divert resentment from themselves, often ascribe to members of the Society, and especially to confessors, certain actions that had never crossed the confessors' minds, as if they were their authors or advocates." The Pope at least ought to state clearly what activities were prohibited to Jesuits.

Particularly instructive was the paper submitted by Nicasiu Widuman, provincial of the Upper German Province. His was a minority view, but it mirrored most clearly the practice of Vitelleschi, at least for Germany. He was the superior of Vervaux, who as confessor of Maximilian sat in on council meetings with Vitelleschi's approval and who had with the provincial Widuman's permission undertaken a mission to Paris earlier in 1645 to sound out the possibilities for a Franco-Bavarian truce.<sup>35</sup> Widuman questioned whether activities such as peace negotiations, especially involving war with heretics, the imposition or abrogation of taxes, the expulsion of heretics from territories, the formation of alliances and the reconciliation of differences among princes, and the mediation of marriages, were prohibited as matters of reason of state. These all seemed to him to be matters of con-

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<sup>34</sup> One conjectures that the chief reason for not openly sending missionaries into Protestant territories of Germany to evangelize the population was that it challenged the right of reformation conceded to princes by the Peace of Augsburg and invited an influx of Protestant preachers into Catholic territories. Catholic priests were tolerated or operated clandestinely in some Protestant areas, especially cities; see, for example, Hermann Tüchle, ed., *Acta S. C. de Propaganda Fide Germaniam spectantia: Die Protokolle der Propaganda Congregation zu deutschen Angelegenheiten, 1622-1649* (Paderborn, 1962).

<sup>35</sup> This was precisely at the time of Vitelleschi's death. Gerhard Immler, *Kurfürst Maximilian I. und der Westfälische Friedenskongress: Die bayerische auswärtige Politik vom 1644 bis zum Ulmer Waffenstillstand* (Münster, 1992), 62-83.



science for a prince and so to come within the purview of the confessor, who might then give his opinion in council. Might not Jesuits also undertake diplomatic missions in such matters, he asked, with the case of Vervaux clearly in mind?

Widuman raised a further point that others also took up when he declared that the Society could not deny such services to princes without gravely offending them. Obviously, he was thinking of Maximilian. For the moment, Widuman advised the congregation to ask the Pope precisely what he considered to be prohibited to the Society, and to leave further discussion until after the election of the superior general.

In stark contrast to Widuman was the view of Nithard Biber of the Upper Rhenish Province, just to the north, who was himself confessor of the prince-archbishop of Mainz. Biber recommended strictly prohibiting involvement in secular affairs. He wanted superiors to be vigorous (*fortes*) in implementing the Society's legislation. Later he angrily alerted the new superior general, Vincenzo Carafa, to Vervaux's alleged role in advocating the Treaty of Ulm in March 1647, when Maximilian broke temporarily with the emperor and concluded a separate truce with France and Sweden.<sup>36</sup>

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Francisco Aguado, who was twice provincial of Toledo and confessor of the count-duke of Olivares from 1631 until the count-duke's dismissal in 1643, regarded the question in much the same light. In his book *Various Exhortations, Especially Doctrinal*, published in 1641, he developed a theology of war.<sup>37</sup> From this it is evident that he did not consider the long war to be principally a confessional or religious conflict. For him the enemy were the French and the Dutch against whom the Spaniards were defending themselves. Consequently, he made no allowance for Jesuit political activity in cases where heretics or heresy was involved. As did several other delegates, he wanted

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., f. 561. See Carafa to Biber, May 4, 1647, in ARSI, Rheni Superioris 2, f.

<sup>37</sup> On Vervaux's role in preparing the Treaty of Ulm with France, see Immler, *Kurfürst Maximilian I*, 400 f., 427–29, 437–40, 443, 454, 475–77.

<sup>37</sup> *Exhortationes variae doctrinales* (Madrid, 1641), 424–34.



the congregation to prohibit the superior general from granting dispensations that would allow Jesuits to participate in political activities. His remark that "we have suffered severely from such dispensations" surely referred to the political activity of Lamormaini and Contzen, whose championship of the Edict of Restitution in Germany and whose Italian policy ran counter to Spanish interests. Aguado also drew attention to the damage to their spiritual lives that Jesuits caught up in politics normally suffered.

But Vitelleschi had never considered it necessary to grant either Lamormaini or Contzen dispensations for their activities; these were in complete harmony with his understanding of the Society's directives. In fact, we have found no examples of Vitelleschi granting a formal dispensation to participate in political affairs, because he did not think it necessary when religion was at issue and because he came to recognize that conscience and politics frequently overlapped.

Aguado also implied that Vitelleschi had offended the government in Spain and made it difficult for Jesuits there by apparently granting dispensations for political activity in the empire but forbidding it in Spain. The allusion here was to the former Superior General's long effort to prohibit Olivares's former confessor, Hernando Salazar, from serving as a councilor on economic affairs. But Vitelleschi was consistent, in that his prohibition was against Salazar's holding a political office. And religion was not a factor in his case.

Two opinions survive from French Jesuits. Bartholomieu Jacquinot from the province of Champagne affirmed that it had always been and still was law in the Society that Jesuits should refrain from secular activities. This restriction should be communicated to the Pope. Jacquinot's statement represented the position of the Jesuits in France under Richelieu, who had been hurt by the affair of Caussin. His confrere from Aquitaine, Jean Ricard, shared this view, but he allowed for the situation when a prince virtually compelled a Jesuit to engage in political activity. In such cases, with the permission of the superior, such activity could be countenanced.

This led to a theme that was picked up by a number of the delegates. It was not the Society that pushed Jesuits toward participation in political or diplomatic activity, but rather princes who pressured them to undertake it. Francesco Barreto, who had been on the China mission, agreed that Jesuits should refrain from secular activities "except for the respect [we owe to] princes, upon whom the preservation of the Society in their dominions depends." Perhaps there was an allusion here to the position of the Jesuits in the Chinese Empire.

Nuno da Cunha of Portugal in a separate opinion took a similar position, implying that the Society sometimes needed to make concessions in

order to retain the support of princes for its ministries. Political missions or tasks were often requested of or imposed on Jesuits by princes and rulers who wanted to make use of their services, contended seven delegates, mostly Spaniards, in a joint opinion. They were less willing to accommodate princes and recommended that the Pope be asked to intervene to prevent princes from requiring their services.

In their formal response to Innocent X, the fathers of the congregation declared that it was their unanimous view that "the men of our Society should refrain from secular affairs foreign to the sacred canons and to our Constitutions, but that whatever can be prescribed in this matter has been decreed by previous general congregations." They then went on to outline the various Jesuit legislations on the matter, calling attention in particular to the *Instruction for the Confessors of Princes*, which prohibited confessors "from becoming involved in external and political matters, but [bade them] attend only to those matters which had to do with and pertained to the prince's conscience." But here the congregation's response failed to advert to the connection between matters of conscience and political affairs that was at the root of much of the difficulty. All that was

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needed, the congregation maintained, was strict adherence to the legislation in place, and after the election of the superior general, the fathers would discuss remedies for failures to carry out the current directives. They concluded by asserting that not rarely those who complained of Jesuit involvement in political matters wished to transfer blame from themselves to the Society, and that at other times Jesuits were practically forced to carry out the orders of princes that they could not easily refuse.

After submitting its response to Pope Innocent, the congregation proceeded to the election of the superior general. On January 7 its choice fell on Vincenzo Carafa, of the famous Neapolitan family, who was then provincial of Naples, enjoying a reputation for preaching ability as well as for personal holiness of life. Subsequently, the congregation devoted most of its attention to the modifications of the Society's government urged by Pope Innocent. From February 21 to 26 the matter of Jesuit involvement in secular affairs was a subject of discussion; but the delegates seem to have realized the futility of promulgating a detailed decree on the matter and, in



fact, they left further action up to the new superior general. The Pope did not force the issue; he made no mention of it in the initial response he made to the Jesuits on January 1, 1646.<sup>38</sup>

Shortly after his election, in a circular letter to the whole Society entitled "On the Means of Conserving the Society's Primitive Spirit," Carafa emphasized the need to refrain from "the business of the world and temporal matters," citing the gospel passage where Jesus refused to serve as a judge (Luke 12:14); he went on to caution Jesuits about allowing themselves to be dragged into these matters by others, even by princes. But he said nothing specific about politics or matters of state.<sup>39</sup> His objective was to attempt to take a harder line than Vitelleschi, but in this he did not meet with much success. That is another story, however.

## Conclusion

As we look at the situation of the Society during the Thirty Years War and the policies adopted by the Eighth General Congregation, what can we learn for our own time, so different in culture and in social and political

structures? First, we should note that the Society did not hesitate to place a Jesuit in the difficult position of court confessor, and it hoped to advance the Church's and the Society's mission through him. In doing so, it followed Ignatius's example, who required either Mirón or da Câmara to take the post of confessor to King John III of Portugal. He expected that the confessor would exercise an influence on the king that would benefit all who were under royal authority, and that specifically he would advance the cause of the Society's mission in Ethiopia. Would Ignatius have directed one of the two Portuguese Jesuits

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to serve as confessor of the king had he been able to look ahead eighty years? Would he have been willing to submit Jesuits to the risks that went with a post at the center of political power had he foreseen the problems and in some cases the hostility that court confessors brought down upon the Society? I think that the answer would be yes. To respond to a question

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<sup>38</sup> Constitution of Innocent X, Jan. 1, 1646, *InstSI* 1:177-79.

<sup>39</sup> *Epistolæ Præpositorum Generalium Societatis Iesu* (Ghent, 1847), 1:463, 465.



implied at the start of this essay, the difficulties that arose were part of the price to be paid by a spirituality of work in the world.

Yet the experience of the Society in the Thirty Years War and especially the fundamental ambiguity and even disagreement about what constituted improper involvement in politics for a Jesuit suggests strongly that we are not able to avoid this ambiguity and disagreement in our own more complex times. The *Complementary Norms* encourage us to "involvement in civic activity" and to "participating in social mobilization," but they prohibit a role in "partisan politics." The line here may necessarily remain murky. Discernment and consultation with superiors and others are called for, as well as recognition of the impact of actions in one country on the work of the Society elsewhere. Both Lamormaini and Caussin might have avoided problems had they consulted with others as Aquaviva's *Instruction* required.

Finally, Jesuits must expect that there will be differences among them on social and political programs and policies. If that was the case in the seventeenth century, so will it be much more the case in the twenty-first, when the Society has become considerably more universal and finds represented within itself many more national and cultural viewpoints. Unity of thought on social and political issues may have been an ideal of Ignatius—I do not think that it was—but it has scarcely ever been the reality in the Society and certainly was not during the Thirty Years War. We must expect disagreements and differences among us in our more complex period of history. Our union of minds and hearts exists at a deeper level, in commitment to Christ and to the gospel values of the Exercises.



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